

Scoping Notice
2019 Blowdown Project
USDA Forest Service (USFS)
Lakewood-Laona Ranger District
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Langlade and Oconto Counties, Wisconsin

Background

On July 19, 2019, a derecho, which produced large downburst of straight-line winds, went through Langlade and Oconto Counties. According to the National Weather Service, the damage path was 60 miles long and up to 10 miles wide, with winds up to 90 miles per hour. The Lakewood-Laona Ranger District on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest has estimated the storm damage at about 51,000 acres on the forest at this time. The whole district has not been assessed, so this estimate is probably low. No public map is available at this time.

The intent of this project is to address the damage that occurred from the derecho in a manner that will protect human communities and restore the affected areas to a productive forest.

Proposed Action

This project would propose the following actions to address the above needs. A Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest 2004 Lands and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) amendment is not anticipated to implement these actions. These actions include:

- Conducting timber salvage to reduce the potential for insect and disease outbreaks and catastrophic wildfire. Harvesting includes trees that are down, root sprung, have a broken top or at least 10 percent lean. This could include all species and all sizes of dead and dying trees.
- Regenerating damaged sites after salvage using appropriate planting methods or natural regeneration.
- Constructing temporary roads and there may be many miles (back in spurs needed for safe decking).
- Incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.
- Removing biomass from the damaged areas
- Removal of hazardous fuels
- Removal of incidental green trees to address other issues, such as access
- Restoration/repair of other resources, such as recreation sites, stream crossings, etc.
- Removal of trees to reduce insect and disease impacts

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to address the catastrophic forest damage that resulted from the July 19, 2019 derecho. There is a need to address this situation in a manner that will protect human communities threatened by the damage and that will restore the damaged forest to a productive condition pursuant to the goals and objectives of the forest plan. Specific needs for this action are:

1. Restoring Productive Forest. The damage throughout all management areas has resulted in widespread masses of leaning, down, and dying timber. This is anticipated to inhibit prompt forest regeneration and increase insect and disease incidence such that adjacent, undamaged forest would be threatened.

Although derechos are naturally occurring events, they are only a part of the long process of natural progression to forest restoration. The damage from this storm is likely to expand as insect and disease buildups in the damaged stands spill out and kill trees in adjacent stands. This sets up the landscape for catastrophic wildfire. Although catastrophic wildfire can set the stage for natural regeneration of forests, it has many obvious, unacceptable consequences in other areas. In order to manage timberlands in a manner consistent with forest plan goals (1.4, 1.4a), there is a need to regenerate stands to productive timber conditions, where the derecho damaged trees. Site preparation, planting, and timber stand improvement activities would be needed to regenerate damaged stands to a productive condition.

In the management area (MA) 8 (Research and development), there is a need to manage for natural processes when it can be acceptably done. Slower regeneration and higher levels of down woody debris are acceptable in these areas. The forest plan provides for reserving a portion of catastrophic events (objective 1.4i), and such reserves are consistent with these special management areas.

In MA 6A (Semi-primitive non-motorized, low disturbance), the storm created severe damage to the Jones Springs area. The forest plan states on page 3-31, “Timber harvesting is normally not allowed. However, infrequent timber harvesting may take place for any of the following reasons:

The timber harvesting is needed for public protection, pest control management, or to create desired conditions for tree regeneration following catastrophic events such as wind or fire.”

2. Hazardous Fuel Reduction. The storm damage has created acres of hazardous fuels adjacent to residential areas and developed lakeshores (the “Wildland Urban Interface”, or WUI). Because of the high values threatened (i.e. life and property), there is a need to substantially reduce the likelihood of destructive fire (forest plan goal 2.8, objective 2.8c). In areas outside the WUI, the derecho has increased fuels loading in the remainder of the blow-down project area. Although values that would be lost from fire in these areas are not as high, there is still a need to restore fuel conditions to more typical levels to promote the regeneration of stands and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire.

3. Salvaging Wood Products. There is a need for the forest to contribute toward satisfying the demand for wood products (forest plan goal 2.5). Salvage is needed to address this need while

avoiding the waste of the existing value that would be lost through future decay. Salvage of valuable wood products meets the needs of the public by providing jobs and resources that support local communities (local economy, school and roads) and lifestyles. Since removal of the excess debris in damaged stands is required for both restoring productive forest and for reducing hazardous fuels, there is an additional need to salvage as it accomplishes these needs in an effective (prompt) and efficient (economic) manner.

4. Restoration/repair of other resources. This would include restoring or repairing damage from the blowdown to recreation sites, replacing culverts, opening of trails/routes, etc.

Decisions to be Made

Through the environmental analysis process, the District Ranger will determine whether that this project will proceed, and if so, where and under what conditions it will proceed.

Relevant Laws and Documents

Function specific laws

Implementing this proposal would include analyzing the physical and biological environments in the analysis area, the relationship between the proposal and laws, regulations, and agency policy.

Participation Requested

At this time, the Forest Service is requesting information and other assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies, and other individuals or organizations that have an interest in or could be affected by the proposed action. Specific information is the most useful for the identification of issues and development and analysis of alternatives to the proposal.

The Forest Service is not planning any other public participation other than this request. All persons who provide feedback in response to this request will continue to receive information about this project and will be included in any additional public participation effort that may occur. Those who do not respond will not receive additional information.

Feedback received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who participated, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action. Information submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous feedback will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the information may be resubmitted with name and address within 10 days.

This Public Scoping Notice and the project map are available on the Worldwide Web at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=56538

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